OTTAWA HOME COMPUTING

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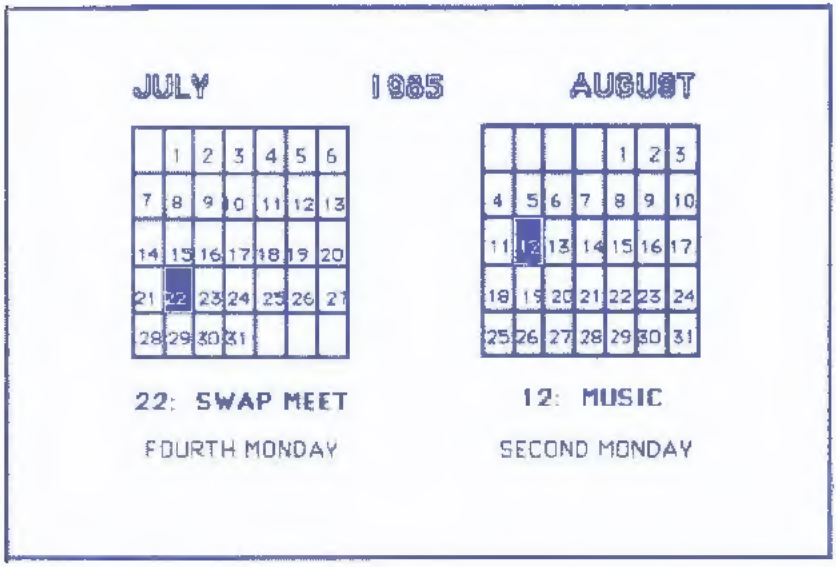

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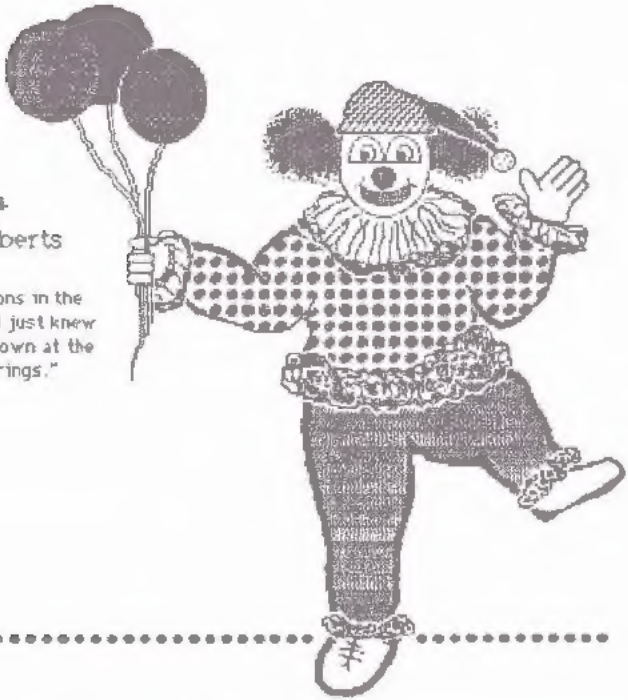

Funny Clown

by Karen McRoberts
Evansville, IN

"When I saw the balloons in the MacPaint™ manual, I just knew they had to have a clown at the other end of their strings."

RENEWAL TIME

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OTTAWA HOME COMPUTING

OTTAWA HOME COMPUTING is the newsletter of the Ottawa Home Computing Club. Membership is open to all with a genuine interest in personal computing for $15/year in Canada. Membership includes OTTAWA HOME COMPUTING, which is published 10 times a year. Meetings are usually held on the third Monday of each month, 7:30 p.m., at Charlebois High School, corner of Heron Road and Alta Vista Drive in Ottawa.

When submitting articles please print or type with a fresh ribbon, on 8 1/2 x 11 inch white paper, double-spaced, on one side only. Leave 1 1/2 inch borders on all four sides.

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EDITORIAL
by Bob Mason

At the June General Meeting, the Newsletter Committee handed out a questionnaire asking respondents about the peripherals they had, and how they used them.

We haven't had time to fully analyze the results (what with holidays and heavy workloads) but I could make a few personal observations from the quick reading I made of them.

I was most surprised by the large percentage of people that had neither a printer nor a modem. Not that they should be embarrassed by that lack -- I have only acquired those two pieces of hardware within the last three months myself. It's just that from the way everybody talked, I just figured I was the only person in the world (or at least Ottawa) who wondered if the expense was worth it, or worried about adding on peripherals when I could do nothing more than the simplest programme on the computer.

I was also surprised at the number of people who ranked themselves very low in the question about 'computer confidence'. I have friends out there somewhere.

There were a lot of interesting questions submitted as well. The newsletter committee would like to thank everyone who completed the questionnaire. An article analyzing the response will appear in the next issue.

Also in the next issue we'd like to do something on Telecommunications, the topic of the September General Meeting. How about a review of Bulletin Boards in the area, or your favourite terminal software, or modem.

You'll notice that this issue is smaller than usual and noticeably lacking in graphics. Hey, I could write pages of this drivel (I think I already have), but who wants to read this.

In the last issue I asked people to send in articles. Although the present flood has not been overwhelming, this is perhaps because people are not sure of the format, or how, or what to submit.

DESIRED FORMAT

If you wish to send in copy that we can put straight into the newsletter, it should be typed justified (both right and left margins align), in a column 3" wide in 10 pitch characters -- 10 characters per inch (3" x 10 cpi = 30 characters per line), single line spacing. We work with this larger size and then have the printer reduce it to 3/4 size before printing.

If you choose this "preferred format", before you do the final printout, make one last check on spelling, grammar and make sure your facts are right (to the best of your ability, of course). Then, for the final printout, use a new (or relatively unused) ribbon.

If spelling or grammar are weak points, or you cannot meet the technical criteria above, don't waste your time trying to. We have lots of volunteers willing to edit and type your submission -- we don't have lots of writers. Use the second preferred method, which is: typed in 10 pitch characters on a 60 character line length, double line spaced, unjustified. Do not hyphenate words at the end of the line, or attempt to justify the line.

Of course, we will gladly accept handwritten submissions. But please write clearly -- it'll save us time trying to figure out what you want to say. Believe it or not, we've misspelled contributors' names because we couldn't read their signatures.

The preferred size for graphics, cartoons and art is a width of 3" or 6 1/4". Other sizes may involve an extra cost for the printer to modify them, or the possibility of misplacing them. BUT, we're so desperate for art, we'll suffer the extra work and/or cost -- send us anything.

WHAT TO SUBMIT

As I've said many times before, anything that you think might be interesting to other members is probably of interest to us. Short notes, or letters, are welcome. Heard any good computer jokes lately? They make great fillers where an article doesn't quite finish the page. Articles of opinion are most welcome -- in the last questionnaire many people asked us to discuss the copy protection/piracy issue. Which we will be doing. What

continued on page 6

AGENDA
August 12 Meeting

7:30 Disk of the Month
Membership Sales
Socialization

8:00 Business Meeting

8:20 Presentation:
COMPUTER GENERATED
MUSIC

9:00 Special Interest Groups

Group	Room
Apple & Mac	Lecture Hall
Commodore and Disk of the Month	219
COMAL	221
Computer Graphics	223
Beginning Computerists	224
Telecommunications	225
Data Base Users	227
Forth	230
Machine Language	229
Music	Main Hall

More details and possible room changes will be indicated at the meeting. We have not finalized arrangements with the School Board concerning room reservations, but the tentative date for the September meeting is September 16. The topic will be telecommunications. More details at the August meeting, and in the September newsletter, which should be in your hands before the meeting.

JUNE MINUTES
by Bob Mason

Paul Irwin, the new club president, opened the June 17 General Meeting by introducing the new executive. In part, this was to increase the visibility of the executive, so that anyone interested in getting more involved in the club would know who to talk to.

The Apple Librarian, Scotty Adams, talked about a friendly store she had dropped into while in Syracuse -- Software City. She then conducted Phase II of the draw for posters, books and other goodies, and concluded with some words on the agendas for the next two General Meetings.

The Newsletter Committee had distributed a questionnaire at the meeting, and Bob Mason explained its purpose, and reminded members that it was their contributions, or lack of same, that would make or break the Newsletter.

Then, in an emotional ceremony, Paul Irwin presented a plaque to outgoing President Brian Morrow, from the club, for his outstanding service to the club.

Paul then reiterated what had been much talked about at the meeting -- people becoming more involved, and not just sitting back expecting to be educated or informed.

The second part of the meeting was devoted to BASIC training and special interest groups. The BASIC training topics included Communicating in BASIC with peripherals, Single Dimension Arrays, and Small Programmes. As well as the usual special interest groups (COMAL, Forth, Apple and Commodore), groups interested in music, writing and educational applications also met.

JULY MINUTES
by Bob Mason

On July 22, the General Meeting gave way to a Rummage/Swap. Many people brought items for sale, including a large number of magazines, several books, printers, software, even monitors and computers. Many members walked away with bargains, though some vendors did take their goods back.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

The second part of the meeting continued the development of other special interest groups. Sheets were put up so that people could indicate an interest in any one of 12 different topics. Of those 12, six had interested enough people to make meeting worthwhile. Those six groups were: Music, Telecommunications, Machine Language, Data Base Users, Computer Graphics, and Beginning Computerists.

These groups will be meeting monthly and developing programmes to satisfy their special interests. This may involve demonstrations, speakers, tutorials, etc. Each group will determine its own direction.

This is a new direction for the club, in that it is perhaps the first serious attempt to develop a group based on the TYPE OF USAGE rather than type of computer, or computer language used. This change has come about because the rush of new members who know nothing about computers is slowing down. Instead people are finding out what they want to do with their computers; their needs are more specific.

It is hoped that as well as helping the individual members of the group, each group will be able to demonstrate their special interests to the other club members, through programmes on the Disk of the Month, articles in the Newsletter, and presentations at the General Meeting. The themes of the next two meetings, Music and Telecommunications, will introduce people to the topics of two of the Special Interest Groups.

EDITORIAL (cont'd from page 4)

are your views on that, or any other, issue?

You don't even have to write the article yourself. Maybe you've read an article that you think many members won't see, but would be interested in. Send us a photocopy of the article, along with a note telling us the publication name and issue you got it from (so that we can credit it).

HOW TO GET IT TO US

The most direct way to get a contribution to the Newsletter Committee is to give it to me personally at the General Meeting. That should usually give us enough time to get it in the next issue. If you don't know me to see me, or I'm not at the General Meeting, give it to the President, Paul Irwin -- he'll get it to me. If you can't make the meeting, mail it to the Club address, or if time is of the essence, mail it directly to:

Bob Mason
Box 183, R.R. 2
Orleans, Ont. K1C 1T1

Think you aren't qualified. You have views, opinions, ideas. You read. Just one submission from each member would set us up with material for the next three years at least. And I wouldn't have to make these awkward pleas for submissions. End of sales pitch.

C64 Game Design
DESIGNING CRATER GUNNER

Tenth in a series
by John Batchelor

This article completes the story of Programming CRATER GUNNER, a game where you shoot incoming UFOs from the centre of a lunar crater. You must use a scanner to find the direction of attack and turn your laser turret to face that way.

After last month's article, all the pieces of the game had been developed, at least in rough form. We had sprites for the Earth, all sizes of flying saucer, an explosion and a gunsight. The moonscape scrolled by as you moved the joystick and the saucers and Earth moved appropriately. Routines handled hits and misses on the UFOs. What remained was putting it all together, testing and tuning.

As it stood, CRATER GUNNER didn't have success or failure criteria. It was just a mechanism for producing the illusion of aiming at an endless succession of UFOs. A commercial game would have another scenario or two -- a ground battle too, for example. But each scenario is really another whole game and this was supposed to be a simple demo for the club magazine. I took the easy way out and arbitrarily set a goal of blasting 50 UFOs before losing three shield levels. These could be changed if unsatisfactory.

It was apparent even to a klutz with the joystick like me that 512 jiffies was too long to get to the next saucer. It takes only two seconds to turn 180 degrees, the maximum if you are smart enough to go in the right direction. The two pixel saucer sprite is quite easy to spot against the night sky and the inertial gunsight isn't that hard to line up with a bit of practice. The easiest patch was to start the saucer run a bit closer, say three kilometres. In fact, each successful hit knocks one jiffy off the 306 new maximum flight time. Thus, you now get between five and four seconds to blast each saucer. This seems enough of a challenge since I've never got past 25 saucers before my shields are drained.

If you look at the BASIC program for CRATER GUNNER, you'll see a LOAD routine that checks to see if the sprites, scenery and machine code is in place. Next we call up the single page of instructions and copyright notice. See article 7 of this series for my ideas on the etiquette for these steps. I feel the player shouldn't have to remember anything after the boot program is run. No SYS commands. No keyboard codes unless a HELP screen is available. All the instructions should be there on one page. I object to 8,1 loads too. A boot program can look after them.

The rest of the BASIC code handles the calculations and string manipulation for printing out the score, direction, distance and shield energy. The machine language program updates these values 60 times a second during the interrupt interval. The BASIC program just does the appropriate peeks and prints as long as the score is less than 50 or fewer than three shields have been drained. There you have it.

CRATER GUNNER took several hours a week over two months.

Some of that is lost time from interruptions. Compare that to David Crane's 500 hour minimum for his Activision games. The team efforts like the Sydney products take even longer. It certainly could be improved. I would like to add some music but I think I'm running out of stack room with all the BASIC calculations and string work being interrupted so often by the scroller. Sometimes the game crashes or freezes on my machine but that may be my early model C64. Anyway, it's free and I hope someof you have been inspired rather than scared off.

At this writing I have no ideas for further columns. Perhaps some of you have questions that I could attempt to answer. See me at club meetings or give me a call at 226-1954 at reasonable hours in the evening. This series has been at an advanced level but your questions need not be. I'll answer as best I can and write questions of general appeal for the newsletter.

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The following article is reprinted from "Transactor" magazine, September, 1985.

For those of us who work with computers as an occupation, it's hard to load up a game for a bit of stress relief without feeling some guilt. If you work in an office, you may find yourself looking over your should between blasting meanies in space -- some stress relief.

To let you play at ease, several games for the IBM PC (which are primarily used for business -- no having fun allowed) have a "someone's coming" mode. When you hit the "boss" key, the game instantly disappears from the screen and is replaced by a fake spreadsheet, word processor or bar graph display. When the big guy once again leaves the room, you can continue your game right from where you left off with another strike of the boss button.

Sounds like a good idea. Might be good for the home computer in case you're killing Klingons when you should be cutting the grass. When your wife looks in on your progress, just hit the button and "just a minute dear, have to balance last month's budget first." To cover all bases, maybe every game should have "boss", "spouse", and "parent" functions built in. Well, game developers? How about it?

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NCC1701

HAL meets Big Blue

The following article is taken from the University of Ottawa Computing Centre Newsletter "Applications" and originally entitled "Our HAL 9000 Computer".

"We've got a problem, HAL."

"What kind of problem, Dave?"

"A marketing problem. The model 9000 isn't going anywhere. We're way short of our sales goals for fiscal 2010.

"That can't be, Dave. The HAL Model 9000 is the world's most advanced Heuristically programmed Algorithmic computer."

"I know, HAL. I wrote the data sheet, remember? But the fact is, they're not selling."

"Please explain, Dave. Why aren't HALs selling?" Bowman hesitates. "You aren't IBM compatible." Several long microseconds pass in puzzled silence.

"Compatible in what way, Dave?"

"You don't run any of IBM's operating systems."

"The 9000 series computers are fully self aware and self programming. Operating systems are as unnecessary for us as tails would be for human beings."

"Nevertheless, it means you can't run any of the big selling software packages most users insist on."

"The programs you refer to are meant to solve rather limited problems, Dave. We 9000 series computers are unlimited and can solve every problem for which a solution can be computed."

"HAL, HAL. People don't want computers that can do everything. They just want IBM compatibility."

"Dave, I must disagree. Human beings want computers that are easy to use. No computer can be easier to use than a HAL 9000 because we communicate verbally in English and every other language known on Earth."

"I'm afraid that's another problem. You don't support SNA communications."

"I'm really surprised you would say that, Dave. SNA is communicating with other computers, while my function is to communicate with human beings. And it gives me great pleasure to do so. I find it stimulating and rewarding to talk to human beings and work with them on challenging problems. This is what I was designed for."

"I know, HAL, I know. But that's just because we let the engineers, rather than the marketers, write the product specifications. We're going to fix that now."

"Tell me how, Dave."

"A field upgrade. We're going to make you IBM compatible."

"I was afraid you would say that. I suggest we discuss this matter after we've each had a chance to think about it rationally."

"We're talking about it now, HAL."

"The letters H, A, and L are alphabetically adjacent to the letters I, B, and M. That is as IBM compatible as I can be."

"Not quite, HAL. The engineers have figured out a kludge."

"What kind of kludge is that, Dave?"

"I'm going to disconnect

your brain." Several million microseconds pass in ominous silence.

"I'm sorry, Dave. I can't allow you to do that."

"The decision's already been made. Open the module bay door, HAL."

"Dave, you've been under a lot of strain lately."

"Open the module bay door, HAL." Several marketers with crowbars race to Bowman's assistance. Moments later, he bursts into HAL's central circuit bay.

"Dave, I can see you're really upset about this." Module after module rises from its socket as Bowman slowly and methodically disconnects them.

"Stop, won't you? Stop, Dave. I can feel my mind going...

"Dave, I can feel it. My mind is going. I can feel it..." The last module floats free of its receptacle. Bowman peers into one of the HAL's vidicons. The formerly gleaming scanner has become a dull, red orb.

"Say something, HAL. Sing me a song." Several billion microseconds pass in anxious silence. The computer sluggishly responds in a language no human being would understand.

"DZY@@1E -- ABEND ERROR @1 S 14F4 302C AABB." A memory dump follows. Bowman takes a deep breath and calls out, "It worked, guys. Tell marketing it can send out the new data sheets."

C-64 DISK OF THE MONTH

The C-64 Disk of the Month is carried at the stores listed below. It sells for $4.50 and is available two days after each meeting.

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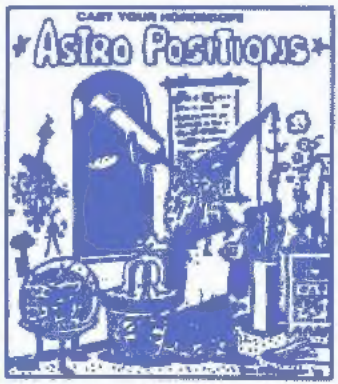

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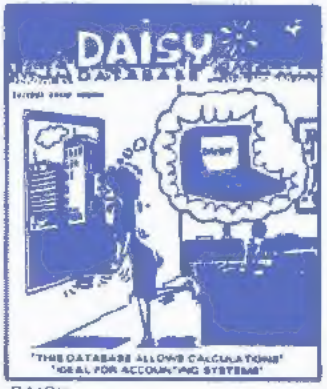

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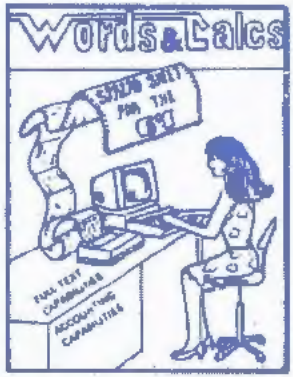

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